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ABSTRACT

The Michif language, spoken by descendants of French Canadian fur traders and the Cree and Ojibwe Indians of western Canada and the northern United States, is a difficult and unique language because it uses French for nouns and Cree for verbs, therefore comprising two different sets of grammatical rules. This book employs historical research and fieldwork data to present the first detailed analysis of this language. The central question of this book is to determine what kind of language Michif is and why, when, and how it developed. Solving this mystery involves drawing on linguistics, anthropology, ethnohistory, and native studies. To show the exceptionality of Michif, a brief review of theories of language contact is provided, and it is shown how Michif confounds all these theories and defies any attempt at conventional classification. Several theories concerning the origin and nature of Michif (the new nation/mixed identity, trade language, separation task, pointing, verb-noun mixing, code-mixing, relexification, and difficult parts hypotheses) are presented and dismissed. The book refutes all previous theories of the origin of Michif and proposes that this language can be understood only through an interdisciplinary approach that draws on typological linguistic, historical linguistic, sociolinguistic, anthropological, ethnohistorical and historical data. Extensive references and indices (subject and proper noun) are included. (KFT)

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